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ABSTRACT

The Hillsborough County School District is recognized as the nation's most successfully desegregated metropolitan school district in the United States. Basic statistics show that the pupil population has grown to 115,000; pupil and faculty composition is approximately 80% white and 20% black; 56,000 pupils are transported daily, 25,000 for purposes of desegregation only; and the instructional program is operated with a minimum of disruption with good parental and community support. Successful desegregation and transformation of a dual school system to a unitary one is due to a variety of reasons, such as: that the Board of Education is not divided; that tampa has a Latin community that may have been more ready to share equal facilities with black community; that a white superintendent, respected black desegregation leaders, and black school administrator form an effective team; that a desegregation plan is developed through community involvement with committees composed of large numbers of people from all walks of life and all areas of the community; that pre-planning and anticipation of needs of difficulties -- especially busing needs -- takes place; that there was support from the news media; and that there was an absence of emotionality and sensationalism about the issue. Most white parents accept integration as required by law and do not attempt to thwart it. Black parents are strongly in favor of integrated schools but express dissatisfaction over the large amount of busing required of their children. (Author/AM)

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SPEAKER: Raymond O. Shelton, Superintendent, Hillsborough County Schools, Tampa, Fla.

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Summary of Remarks

In May, 1971 Judge Ben Krentzman of the Federal District Court for the Middle District of Florida (Tampa Division) reopened the Hillsborough County, Florida School Desegregation Case (which had been on-going since 1958) and ordered the Hillsborough County School Board to completely desegregate all of the County Schools for the 1971-72 school year.

The School Board was ordered to submit by June 15, 1971 an effective plan for desegregation of all schools. The Court required the School Board to begin with the proposition that a white to black ratio of 86% to 14% was appropriate for senior high schools, 80% to 20% proper for junior high schools, and 79% to 21% appropriate for elementary schools. These ratios reflected the ratios of the white to black student populations for each type of school. The Court ordered that the plan accomplish desegregation by pairing, grouping, clustering, and the use of satellite (non-contiguous attendance zones). The Court held that if the School Board failed to submit an acceptable plan the Court would formulate its own plan.

The impact of such an order staggers the imagination when all the facts are known. The Hillsborough County School District in 1971 was the twenty-sixth largest in student population in the nation with a total of 101,298 pupils of which 19.5% were black. The land area of the School District was 1,037.9 square miles or approximately the geographical size of the State of Rhode Island. There were 130 separate school building locations and approximately 10,000 employees. In 1970, 46% of the system's black students attended fifteen all-black schools; 69% of the black students (though only 19% of the total student population) were in schools which were at least 50% black and 69% of the white pupils attended all white or 95% white schools.

Today, four years later, the Hillsborough County School System is completely desegregated as it has been since September, 1971, as was ordered by Judge Krentzman. The pupil population of all schools has grown to 115,000 and is approximately 80% white and 20% black. The faculties of all schools are approximately 80% white and 20% black, 56,000 pupils are transported daily (25,000 of them for purposes of desegregation only) and most importantly of all a very well-respected instructional program is operated with a minimum of disruption with good parental and community support. Even as far back as June, 1972 John Perry in an article entitled "County

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Schools Win Revolution" in the Tampa Times wrote about the first year of complete desegregation. He stated that in Hillsborough County more than any other school district in the nation, a black child's world and white child's world were brought together. The meeting place was the schoolhouse and the vehicle was the yellow school bus. He pointed out the toll in terms of personal trauma for students, teachers, and parents in physical and material outlay was high. Yet, it was not nearly as high as feared by many or predicted by those opposed at the outset.

During the year 197 72, the New York Times, The Washington Post, six Civil Rights groups, including the NAACP and Southern Regional Council identified Hillsborough County as the nation's most desegregated school district. It has continued to be so recognized and further recognized as the most successfully desegregated metropolitan school district in the United States.

How was this school district desegregated without all the trauma that seems to follow such efforts and why has it been more successful than all other efforts nationally? How, in one short summer was a massive school district transformed from a segregated dual school system to a unitary school system? How were the strong objections of blacks and whites overcome? How were the strikes and walk-outs and boycotts and marches avoided? How were the logistical problems solved and how was white flight avoided?

The answers to all of the questions lie basically in anticipation and in planning. The Superintendent of Schools, Dr. Raymond Shelton, and his staff anticipated that the decision in the Swann versus Charlotte Mecklenburg case would be in favor of desegregating schools, and they anticipated that Judge Krentzman would immediately issue a similar order for Hillsborough County and began to plan for these eventualities prior to their occurance. Dr. Shelton recommended to the School Board, in the early Spring of 1971, that Mr. E. L. Bing, a highly respected black administrator and Director of Federal Programs, be relieved of his duties and be appointed to head up a committee of citizens from the entire Hillsborough County area to begin work on plans for the complete desegregation of the School System. A staff committee was formed to gather all facts and figures and prepare charts and maps to present to the board-appointed Desegregation Planning Committee which would make recommendations of alternate plans to the School Board. This Planning Committee consisted of 150 representatives of diverse segments of Hillsborough County, including prominent business leaders, civic leaders, and important black and white community spokesman. Students who would be affected by the results of the recommendations of this committee were also included on the committee and the committee was divided into subcommittees which worked on various aspects of the desegregation plan.

The plan was developed within the prescribed time limit; it was accepted by the court; and it was implemented effectively and smoothly with the opening of school in September, 1971.

The plan, as finally accepted and implemented, contained separate arrangements for elementary, junior and senior high schools. There were 89 elementary schools in Hillsborough County, and the principal method used to desegregate them was a "clustering" plan. Seventy-seven elementary schools were integrated through 17 clustering arrangements. In each of these, one formerly predominantly black elementary

school was clustered with from two to five formerly predominantly white elementary schools. The black elementary school became a sixth-grade center, and all sixth graders from the black school and each of the white schools attended this sixth-grade center. First to fifth graders from the formerly black school were distributed among the formerly white schools through the use of satellite zones which covered the boundaries of the black school. First through fifth graders who lived within the boundaries of white schools continued in attendance at the schools previously attended. The other elementary schools were integrated through a variety of zoning devices.

The twenty-three high schools and three junior-senior high schools were integrated through clustering and satellite zoning. There were eight cluster arrangements in the plan. In each arrangement for junior high schools, one formerly predominantly black school was clustered with from one to three formerly predominantly white schools. The black junior high school was developed into a seventh grade center, and all seventh graders in that cluster attended it. Eighth and ninth graders from the black junior high school were distributed among the white junior high schools through satellite zones. Eighth and ninth graders who lived within the boundaries of white schools continued in attendance at the schools previously attended. No junior high schools were closed under the plan.

When the plan was drafted, there were 14 senior high schools in Hillsborough County, including three junior-senior high schools. The two formerly black high schools, Blake and Middleton, were made into junior high schools. The name of the formerly white high school, Hillsborough High, was changed to Hillsborough-Middleton High and received most of the black students from Middleton. The other Middleton students were assigned to other formerly white high schools. The attendance area which formerly was served by Blake was divided among a new high school, which was not yet constructed, and formerly white high schools. Rezoning and satellite zones were also used to integrate the rural high schools. The one vocational high school had no precise boundaries but was integrated.

Under the plan for elementary schools the white-to-black ratio was 79% to 21%, for junior highs it was 80% to 20%, and for high schools 85% to 15%. Actual attendance figures did not vary significantly from these proportions.

Before accepting the plan, the court held a hearing and permitted community members to voice objections. Throughout this period, the School Board, the Superintendent of Schools, The P.T.A., the churches, the Chamber of Commerce, responsible civic groups, and the press actively supported the plan.

To avoid anticipated problems and ease adjustment of integrated schools, the School Board adopted the rule that all students who held school offices, were cheerleaders, were members of any organization or team in their former schools would automatically retain their positions in the schools to which they were assigned for 1971-72. This meant that the president of a class in a formerly black school was co-president with the president of the class at his new school.

To further aid adjustment, every junior and senior high school was assigned a community relations specialist and an assistant specialist. Many of these people were former teachers. Their salaries were paid through an Emergency School Assistance Program (ESAP) grant. White community relations specialists had black assistants,

and vice-versa. During the summer, the specialists held seminars with teachers, principals, and students to help them in inter-personal relations with people of different races. During the school year, the specialists were involved in working out inter-personal relations problems and providing a means for students to talk with administrators. Every high school and junior high school had a student advisory committee of 12 black students and 12 white students, picked by the student government to work with the community relations specialists. The specialists and student biracial committee played important roles in moderating any problems which arose between blacks and whites.

Integration Within Schools

The school board did not find it necessary to abolish ability groupings in schools to maintain integrated classes. It directed, however, that principals maintain classrooms less than fifty percent black. In the sixth and seventh grade centers and in the junior high schools, there was some team teaching and the use of other innovative teaching programs. These teams and programs were well integrated.

Whenever a pupil was on a team or in an extracurricular activity, a school board rule required that a bus be provided at the school to transport him home after regular school closing hours. The hope was that the students who participated in sports with students of another race, or who worked with them in other extracurricular activities, were the people most likely to develop interracial friendships.

Transportation

In 1969/70 the school system transported some 30,000 students on 186 school buses. The 1970/71 operating budget for student transportation was approximately $826,000. In that year, each morning, school buses travelled approximately 6,403 miles.

Before the desegregation plan was adopted, the administrative staff anticipated the need for more school buses. Thus, when the plan was accepted, buses had been located, specs drawn, and bids received and there was no delay in awarding the bid and receiving 125 additional buses for September 1971. The new buses were financed through a $1 million bank loan undertaken by the school board.

Under the plan about 53,000 students were bused to and from school, an increase of 23,000 students. Of those students who were bused across the country for purposes of desegregation, the number of black and white pupils was approximately the same. The cross busing of students each morning required travel of about 6,232 miles, one way, out of a total one way morning mileage of some 13,000 miles. The system's operating budget for 1971/72 for transportation was $1,369,000.

The school board was also ordered to desegregate its faculty fully by September 1971 although much of this had already occurred during the 1970/71 school term. The desegregation faculty ratio required for 1971/72 was about eighty percent white and twenty percent black at each school. For the 1971 school year, the board ordered that all teachers be transferred to the schools to which their students, or the majority of them, had been assigned. The teachers were to teach the same grade level and subjects that they had taught the previous year. These requirements minimized the problem of teacher reassignments.

While not asserting that they favor integrated schools, most white parents accept integration as required by law and are not attempting to thwart it. Some white parents speak of benefits for black and white children attending integrated schools. These parents feel it is important for children of diverse backgrounds to learn to get along with one another.

Black parents are strongly in favor of integrated schools and supportive of the plan although they often express dissatisfaction over the large amount of busing required of their children.

Evidence of white parents' acquiescence in integration is seen in their continued widespread involvement in PTA's, even in schools in black areas.

Why Successful Desegregation?

Desegregation in a community as diversified and large as Hillsborough County required hard work, a great deal of anticipation, planning, and a measure of luck. The School Board, Superintendent Shelton, and the then Director now Assistant Superintendent Bing deserved a great deal of credit. The board accepted Superintendent and committee reports and recommendations, reviewed each situation thoroughly and made decisions as a group. There were many opportunities for Board members to make personal feelings known, but none chose that course which could have quickly divided the community. Successful desegregation occurred in Tampa in a large measure because:

1. The local School Board did its job, followed the law as expressed in the Court Order, and implemented the best possible educational program within a desegregated setting. There was no division on the Board, and there were no attempts on the part of individual Board members to emotionalize or sensationalize the issue.

2. Hillsborough County, and Tampa specifically, has a Latin element and the people have known adversity in their lives. Many had seen prejudice close at hand and others had been victimized by prejudice in their own lives. Perhaps, as a result, the community was more ready to share prosperity and freedom with a black community that deserved such consideration.

3. The white Superintendent and respected black desegregation leaders proved to be an effective team. The Superintendent had entered the Tampa scene at a time when school system morale was low and public confidence shaken. The Board and Superintendent working together from 1967 to 1970 were able to restore confidence in the school system. As a result the white community believed in Dr. Shelton. He built a reserve of confidence among the people within that period and when desegregation became an issue, the community accepted his leadership.

4. Mr. Bing, a black school administrator, also had the total respect and confidence of the black community and also those members of the white community with whom he had contact.

5. The desegregation plan was developed through the involvement of the community with committees composed of large numbers of people from all walks of life and all areas of the community, including the student bodies of the individual high schools. All meetings were held in the open with news media coverage.

6. Preplanning and anticipation of needs and difficulties played a major role in the success of desegregation in Hillsborough County. Anticipating the busing needs that would come as a result of desegregation, the school system went through a program of purchasing 125 new buses so they would be available for the first day of school in August 1971. At the same time, recognizing and anticipating the turmoil that was bound to come through mixing students for the first time in their lives in an area with a history of separation, the system applied for and received the largest Emergency School Assistance Program grant given any school system in the United States. That 2.25 million dollar grant provided a program of human relations specialists in all junior and senior high schools throught the community.

7. School system leaders believed strongly in public education and there was no point in discussing their personal views on desegregation or busing. For the most part, community leaders kept their personal thoughts on these issues to themselves and never attempted to gain personal publicity or political advantage by publicly denouncing desegregation or busing.

8. The newspapers and television stations in the community also played a major part in the success of desegregation in Hillsborough County. Even though the prospect of massive cross-busing and desegregation of the schools was not popular with the majority of the general population, the news media was totally supportive. All committee meetings were open and newspaper and television reporters in attendance, after sitting through numerous meetings, found themselves participating rather than simply reporting on the sessions. They became increasingly knowledgeable about the issues and boundaries of the school system and offered suggestions to the committee as they worked to resolve these problems.

There are probably many other reasons why the Hillsborough County Schools desegregation effort is rated by outside observers as being successful. Not the least of which would be a great group of young people in the schools and a very dedicated competent staff of teachers and administrators throughout the County.

These people along with the School Board refused to be drawn into public arguments on whether desegregation was good or bad. The goal of all seemed to have been to practice their belief in the worth of public education and in following the law.

It seems somewhat ironical that this story of desegregation of a school system from a positive standpoint was written in the South and, to date, cannot be written in Boston, a city designated as the "Cradle of Liberty", or Philadelphia, the city of "Brotherly Love".

Further irony is evidenced by the fact that the combination of a black school administrator, native of rural Hillsborough County, and a superintendent of schools, only three years removed from a large northern city which was more segregated in 1970, albeit de facto, than was Hillsborough County, provided the leadership that enabled this story to be written.

Both Mr. E. L. Bing and Dr. Raymond Shelton in speeches, quoted in the "Washington Post", to the teachers of Hillsborough County prior to the opening of schools in 1971, pointed out that the 1971/72 school year would be a historic year, it could be a year of violence, or sorrow and of damage to young peiple; or it could be a year of positive progress toward solving some of the problems of mankind. Looking back, it can be concluded that the school system and the people of the Hillsborough County community met the problems of school desegregation head-on and found solutions to most of them and are continuing to work on those remaining.

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